

VZCZCXYZ0004
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBK #2927/01 1450902
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 250902Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7201
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 002927

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2017
TAGS: [OTRA](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: OSD/ISA BGEN TOOLAN'S VISIT TO THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 1675

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2632
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2854

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alexander A. Arvizu.
Reason 1.4 (a and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. May 13-18 Brigadier General John Toolan, Principal Director for South and Southeast Asia, met with USG officers, Thai defense officials and scholars to assess the current political situation, road to elections, relations with Burma and the southern insurgency. Thai officials assured Toolan that Thailand would adhere to the timetable publicly laid out to return to parliamentary democracy by the end of the year despite a number of hurdles ahead. Thai, Indonesian and Japanese officials noted the importance of the Cobra Gold Exercise to promote regional stability and expressed a willingness to continue expanding the multilateral nature of the exercise. End Summary.

PROMINENT ACADEMIC ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION

[1](#)2. (C) Chulalongkorn University scholar Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn told BGen Toolan that, although significant challenges remain before Thailand can restore democracy, he believes the Council for National Security (CNS) is committed to hold a constitutional referendum in September and national elections in December. Panitan explained that the draft constitution is complex and contains a number of controversial clauses however the RTG is attempting to educate the electorate and is modifying the most contentious clauses. Regardless of the fate of the draft constitution, Panitan believes that the CNS is committed to keep its timetable. Septel outlines details of Panitan's observations about the South.

ROYAL THAI ARMY SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

[1](#)3. (C) During a visit to the Royal Thai Army Special Warfare Command (RTA SWCOM), LTG Sunai Sampattawanit briefed Toolan about current operations of his command in southern Thailand. Sunai noted that the week prior to Toolan's visit he had lost seven members of his Psychological Operations Battalion to an enemy IED while they were conducting operations in a small village. Sunai briefed efforts of the SWCOM to train and organize paramilitary units led by RTA NCOs and officers (Note: These are called "tahanpran" in Thai and are sometimes referred to in the media as "rangers." Some are critical of their training, see Bangkok 1675). Tahanpran units are being used for various missions but most notably the RTA integrates Muslims into their tahanpran units to deal directly with large Muslim crowds and protesters. The RTA believes these units are better suited to deal with the local populace than regular soldiers. Sunai thanked Toolan for the

suppoQ the USG has given the RTA and SWCOM in the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program and with Information Operations assistance. Toolan noted that U.S. officials continue to monitor the insurgency in the South. He suggested that Prime Minister Surayud,s more balanced approach to the violence there appears to be an improvement over past policies and emphasized the importance of respecting the rule of law. Toolan encouraged Sunai and his staff to work closely with JUSMAGTHAI to identify training shortfalls.

A VIEW FROM CHIANG MAI

¶4. (C) BGen Toolan traveled to Chiang Mai to get a first hand look at refugees, border issues with Burma, and counter narcotics efforts. Toolan visited the Mae La refugee camp in Mae Sot province which houses about 50 thousand mostly Karen refugees. The Thai military is responsible for external security at the camps but daily operations are conducted by Thai provincial officials with help from NGOs. Of note, the Thai refer to the residents as "displaced persons" not refugees. Toolan was also briefed on US relocation procedures for resettling some refugees in the United States. LTG Nipat Thonglek, Chief of the Supreme Command's Thai Border Control Commission, gave a detailed update on Thai-Burma relations.

COBRA GOLD AND DARFUR

¶5. (C) GEN Songkitti Jaggabbataara, Chief of the Joint Staff at the Royal Thai Supreme Command (RTSC), noted the RTSC's support of making the Cobra Gold military exercise more multilateral in the future. He emphasized how the inclusion of Indonesia in the exercise was a positive step for regional stability. Toolan explained to Songkitti that the decision to conduct Cobra Gold was made at the highest levels of the US Government and that approval came only after the USG received Thai assurances that it would stick to its announced timetable for restoring democracy. Songkitti assured Toolan that elections were on track and that the CNS was determined to restore democracy. Songkitti also noted that RTSC planned to commit more than 200 troops, mostly engineers, to the UN Mission in Darfur, Sudan (see Bangkok 2632 and 2854).

¶6. (SBU) BGen Toolan attended the closing ceremonies for Cobra Gold at the Combined Forces HQ in Jomtien. Toolan was briefed on the multilateral nature of the exercise and had a chance to meet members of the five participating nations. Major General Obe from Japan expressed the importance of Cobra Gold for Japan. Obe told Toolan that Cobra Gold was an important venue to identify areas where Japan could expand its participation in peacekeeping operations. Toolan also met with Indonesian officials who expressed their hope to participate in the field-training portion (FTX) of the exercise in the future. All members of the participating and observer nations echoed the success of the multilateral nature of Cobra Gold. They noted that Cobra Gold has built a well trained cadre of allied officers used to working together, as they did during the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

¶7. (U) BGen Toolan did not have an opportunity to clear this message.
BOYCE